Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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APPROVED BY THE SECRETARY
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 028943

NODIS
FOR CHARGE AND AMBASSADOR FROM SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN LEBANON

REFS: (A) BEIRUT 556; (B) DAMASCUS 890

1. FOR BEIRUT: YOU SHOULD CONVEY THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE URGENTLY TO BOUTROS:

-- WE HAVE GREATLY APPRECIATED THE EFFORT THAT FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS AND PRESIDENT SARKIS HAVE MADE TO FIND A WAY TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE THAT HAS ARISEN FOLLOWING THE MOVE OF ASF FORCES SOUTH FROM KFAR HUNI. WE UNDERSTAND THE CONCERN OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT ABOUT SECURITY IN

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THE AREA, AND WE HAVE MADE THIS PLAIN TO THE ISRAELIS IN URGING RESTRAINT ON THEIR PART IN DEALING WITH THE SITUATION.

-- AS CHARGE LANE HAS STATED, WE PROPOSED TO THE ISRAELIS THE IDEA OF PULLING THE UNIT IN KFAR TIBNIT BACK TO JARMAQ. WE HAVE NOW HAD A RESPONSE TO THIS PROPOSAL.

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-- THE ISRAELIS STATE THAT IT CONTINUES TO BE THEIR POSI-
TION THAT SYRIAN FORCES SHOULD WITHDRAW TO THE POSITIONS
THEY OCCUPIED BEFORE JANUARY 23.

-- THEY SAY, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE LIGHT OF THE FORTHCOMING
VISIT OF SECRETARY VANCE TO THE AREA, AND IN VIEW OF THE
LEBANESE WILLINGNESS TO SEEK WAYS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM,
THEY ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL AS MODIFIED BELOW
AS A FIRST STEP IN T.E WITHDRAWAL OF ALL SYRIAN FORCES,
PENDING DISCUSSIONS OF THIS PROBLEM DURING SECRETARY VANCE'S
VISIT. THE ISRAELIS REQUESTED, HOWEVER,THAT THIS FIRST
WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES NOW SOUTH OF NABATIYAH TAKE
PLACE UP TO THE LINE OF THEVILLAGE OF AYSHIYAH. IT IS
IMPLICIT IN THE ISRAELI RESPONSE THAT THERE WOULD THEN BE
NO MOVEMENT OR PATROLLING BY THE SYRIAN FORCES THEREAFTER
SOUTH OF THAT POINT. THEY STATE THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO
BE INFORMED OF THE TIMETABLE FOR THE MOVEMENT OF THE
ELEMENT INVOLVED.

-- THEY CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THEY WILL DISCUSS THE
CONTINUATION AND COMPLETION OF THE SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL WITH
SECRETARY VANCE DURING HIS COMING VISIT TO THE MIDDLE
EAST.

-- THIS RESPONSE OF THE ISRAELIS REPRESENTS A MODERATION
OF THEIR EARLIER POSITION THAT THE ENTIRE WITHDRAWAL OF
SYRIAN TROOPS SHOULD TAKE PLACE PRIOR TO THE SECRETARY'S
VISIT, A POSITION THAT WAS CONVEYED TO US IN DUNNIGAN'S
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FEBRUARY 6 DISCUSSION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON. WE
HAVE GAINED CONSIDERABLE TIME TO LOOK AT THE QUESTION OF
A MORE GENERAL ASF WITHDRAWAL, AND IN THIS RESPECT WE
APPRECIATE VERY MUCH THE SUGGESTIONS MADE BY FOREIGN
MINISTER BOUTROS ON FEBRUARY 8 ON BASIS OF WHICH WE MADE
OUR PROPOSAL TO ISRAELIS.

-- WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE ISRAELIS, IN FOREGOING THEIR
INSISTENCE ON FULL WITHDRAWAL AT THIS TIME, HAVE ASKED FOR
MOVEMENT BACK BEYOND THE POINT ORIGINALLY SUGGESTED BY
FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS. THEIR AIM, APPARENTLY, IS TO
SEE THAT THE NEW SOUTHERNMOST POINT OF THE ASF DEPLOYMENT
IS CLEARLY NORTH OF NABATIYAH.

--WE URGE THAT FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS GIVE US FAVORABLE
LEBANESE RESPONSE TO THIS ISRAELI PROPOSAL SO THAT WE CAN
CONVEY IT TO ISRAELIS BEFORE END OF DAY WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 9 IN WASHINGTON. (FYI: ISRAELI MESSAGE INSISTED
ON REPLY WITHIN 24 HOURS AND YOU SHOULD PRESS FOR

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REPLY WITH THIS IN MIND, BUT WE THOUGHT IT BETTER NOT
TO PUT ISRAELI TIME FRAME TO BOUTROS IN SUCH ULTIMATIVE
TERMS. END FYI).
--ISRAELIS HAVE REACTED POSITIVELY TO IDEA OF PUTTING PURE-
LY LEBANESE FORCE INTO NABATIYAH, MAKING CLEAR IT MUST 0E
ONLY LEBANESE, AND WE WOULD

APPRECIATE KNOWING STATUS OF THIS MOVE.

2. FOR DAMASCUS: PLEASE CONVEY TO KHADDAM (AND SHIHABI,
IF YOU THINK APPROPRIATE) THE FOREGOING POINTS BEING
PASSED TO BOUTROS. IN ADDITION, CONVEY TO KHADDAM FROM
ME THE FOLLOWING:

-- I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S ASSESS-
MENT OF THE SITUATION THAT HAS ARISEN IN SOUTHERN
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LEBANON. WE HAVE OURSELVES BEEN SENSITIVE TO THE CON-
SIDERATIONS HE REFERS TO. IN OUR VIEW, THE OVERRIDING
GOAL MUST BE THE COMMENCEMENT OF PROGRESS TOWARD NEGO-
TIATION OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT. I SEE THIS AS THE
PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF MY FORTHCOMING TRIP TO THE MIDDLE
EAST.

-- WITH THIS GOAL IN MIND, WE HAVE HAD TO SEE NOT ONLY THE
CONSIDERATIONS MENTIONED BY FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM,
BUT ALSO THE RISK THAT TENSIONS OVER THE ASF DEPLOYMENT
IN SOUTHERN LEBANON WOULD HAVE LED TO DEVELOPMENTS THAT
SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZED THE PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATIONS.

-- I THINK THAT BY EMPHASIZING TO THE ISRAELIS THE NEED
FOR RESTRAINT, AND THE PROBLEMS OF SECURITY IN SOUTHERN
LEBANON, WE HAVE BROUGHT THEM TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ARE
PREPARED TO ACCEPT A LIMITED MOVEMENT AT THIS TIME AND TO
CONSIDER THE MORE GENERAL PROBLEM IN THE CONTEXT OF MY
VISIT.

-- I LOOK FORWARD VERY MUCH TO DISCUSSING THE LARGER
ISSUE OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE WITH FOREIGN MINISTER
KHADDAM AND PRESIDENT ASAD, AND I WANTED THEM TO KNOW THAT
OUR HANDLING OF THIS MATTER OF THE ASF DEPLOYMENT HAS
HAD AS A MAJOR GOAL THE AVOIDANCE OF DEVELOPMENTS THAT
WOULD DIVERT US FROM THESE IMPORTANT TALKS.
VANCE

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